



Henderson County Department of Public Health

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Questions/ Comments about COVID-19

April 17- May 4, 2020

The following is a summary of the COVID-19 Q&A discussion from the May 4, 2020

Board of Commissioners Meeting.

Public Health's answers are in Blue

Emergency Management's answers are in Purple

Some duplicated and lengthy questions and comments are summarized for brevity.

Commissioner Grady pointed out that the questions received regarding COVID-19 are getting a bit repetitive. Most of the questions are answered through the dashboard on the Health Department website. Commissioners agreed we may not need to address the questions on a weekly basis, that will be at the discretion of the County Manager.

Topic #1 – Recovery Rates:

1. How many people have recovered from Covid in Henderson County?

As of today: 200 cases, 167 of those are tied to LTCF's. Of the 33 in the general population, **18** report having recovered. The other 15 are not yet at the point where we'd expect them to have recovered.

Topic #2 – Testing:

2. Would you please address why there is such a lack of available cv-19 testing being done in Henderson County?

Everyone recognizes that broader testing is needed. To date, Henderson County has accomplished more than many counties in Western North Carolina in part due to the support of Pardee, AdventHealth and Blue Ridge Health. The supply chain for the needed materials is simply not at a reasonable volume yet. If a physician refers you to get a test, you can get one. The healthcare provider is the gatekeeper for the testing. The norm today is that people get results back in 1-2 days.

3. What, specifically, does your organization need to increase testing availability?

It's improving but we need the complete supply chain- from swabs to viral media needed- to accomplish PCR testing. Every jurisdiction in the country wants these same supplies at the same time and the shortages require that they be prioritized based on need.

4. When are you expecting more tests to be available in the county?

It is difficult to predict in the current environment for diagnostic tests but hope this will continue to improve over time.

5. Will there also be antibody tests?

Yes, validated tests are now coming online, but a positive antibody test doesn't necessarily assure anyone that they have immunity and/or for any particular period of time. As with testing for COVID, the portal to get these will be through your healthcare provider.

6. Have you tested all residents and staff in all congregate facilities (care homes, independent/assisted living, skilled nursing facilities, and county jail)? If not, what are your plans for doing that?

Testing has been very comprehensive in the congregate care facilities where outbreaks have occurred and will continue to be made on a case by case basis relative to risk and contact tracing. Testing large numbers of asymptomatic individuals in facilities without cases can only provide a moment in time assessment of status but is being coordinated with them. Many of these facilities are standing up their own capacity to test.

Topic #3 – PPE:

7. Can face covers (not N95 masks) like bandanas, a cloth or even a thick t-shirt be required, like we already require shirts and shoes in a restaurant. Cities and counties in our state are already doing that, so why aren't we?

We recognize this is a recommendation, but it's not a requirement. It's currently a decision that individuals will have to make. The Governor's phases include the recommendation of face coverings, while the County is not in a position to provide masks for the public it is suggested each person evaluate their situation for the need.

Topic #4 – Long Term Care Facilities:

8. Are nursing home staff included in the nursing home statistics or are they in with the other 33 cases?

The state includes all positive staff in the number of the outbreak, whether they live in county or not. Health Departments remove out of county staff from the County Case numbers in their reporting so they're not duplicated in County Case Counts (this is explained further [here](#)).

Commissioner Lapsley asked for the breakout of staff vs residents.

As of May 5: (updates can be found on the [NCDHHS website](#))

	Staff	residents	deaths
Brian Center	5	42	8
Laurels	11	52	3
Lodge at MR	1	1	1
Cherry Springs	13	44	9

Topic #5 – Stay At Home Order:

9. I've heard that some counties have lifted some of their restrictions, even though the state still has the stay at home order in place. Would Henderson County be able to do the same thing?

In NC, counties are able to make more restrictive guidance than the state, but not less restrictive. The Board will continue to work with the State to gain local control over those decisions to assist our community.

10. In March, the Governor's orders stated that if there is a discrepancy between State and local orders the stricter will prevail. Is the same language in the new order? Henderson's ran out at the end of April. Will a revised declaration be issued by the County?

That is correct, whichever orders are more restrictive are applicable. The County's orders are in effect until repealed. The desire of the Commissioners is to adjust the local State of Emergency to meet the needs of the community and encourages the Governor to give much of that control back to the counties.

11. Based on the data it appears that younger people not in senior living environments should be freed up for normal living now (70% of cases and 100% of deaths). Do you agree? If not why?

To date, there has been a very small sample of testing tied to younger ages. Although these age groups are not likely to experience serious health effects, these same individuals can unwittingly be part of the transmission cycle which

conveys the disease to people who are at high risk. Overall, it is encouraging that our rate of confirmed cases is very low regardless of our testing spectrum.

Topic #6 – Other:

12. Can you compare the rate and number of positive cases of the flu and deaths from the flu to the rate and number of positive cases and deaths from COVID-19?

We are working with an epidemiologist in the region to quantify this in a meaningful way. On a national level, we now report over 68,000 deaths due to COVID-19 and even an extreme flu season typically doesn't exceed 60,000. The timeframe for COVID-19 deaths is also to date much more compressed than a typical flu season.

The death rate is slightly higher than with flu. However, we're not able to test community wide, asymptomatic people. If we could, we believe that mortality rate would come down.

13. Why are Henderson County's website statistics always lower than those for our county on the NC state and Johns Hopkins websites?

Many of those sites are now "catching up" in terms of time with our reporting. The delay is due to a vetting process in place at the State level where information is reviewed before it is posted.

That said, today the state actually showed one higher case count and one higher death count. We investigated and learned they had counted someone twice. When we see something like that, we'll investigate it.

Review of slides created by Assistant County Manager, Amy Brantley for discussion of impact of COVID-19 on Henderson County. Take-aways:

- We have capacity at our hospitals
- When LTCF's numbers are removed, we have a low number of cases in the county
- Health Dept. is training more Contact Tracers to meet the need when we have capacity to test more
- We currently meet the metric required of 30-day supply of PPE for EMS, Hospitals, and Fire Dept. Henderson County has been working on this for more than 90 days, since late January.

Update about the Task Force of business leaders in preparation of re-opening the County, led by Commissioners Lapsley and McCall. They have met virtually on three occasions, reviewing guidelines and considering options for businesses. They have had great, active participation from the business community. They drafted guidelines- but those are on hold until the Governor lifts the state-wide stay-at-home order. May 8 is coming up, so we assume we'll hear from the Governor as to whether that date will open Phase 1 or be extended again.